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ABSTRACT

Numerous parallels exist between two instructional approaches sometimes thought to be incompatible: whole language and Madeline Hunter's "Essential Elements of Effective Instruction." The biggest parallel between whole language and the Hunter model is in the area of meaning: true whole language instruction depends on making learning meaningful and the Hunter model stresses that meaning is the single most important factor contributing to successful and rapid learning. Other parallels include: (1) avoiding the teaching of skills in isolation; (2) emphasizing demonstration and explanation as important teacher actions; (3) stressing creativity and spontaneity; and (4) underscoring the active character of learning. Six parallel aspects of student motivation also exist, including feeling tone and level of success. (Twenty-three notes are included, and a 15-item bibliography is attached.) (RS)

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WHOLE LANGUAGE AND THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION:

SHEATHE YOUR DAGGERS!!!!!

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WHOLE LANGUAGE AND THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION:

SHEATHE YOUR DAGGERS!!!!!

It's a jungle out there. Just when I'm starting to make some headway in convincing teachers that Madeline Hunter is not the Wicked Witch of the West and the Essential Elements of Effective Instruction is not a straightjacket designed to create docile, cookie-cutter educators, people come back from Whole Language workshops ready to turn their classrooms into exciting, fertile Whole Language environments with lots of great ideas and one cautionary dictum - In a true Whole Language classroom, you'd better "ditch the Doc," since the EEEI and Whole Language are incompatible.

The tempest often centers around a seemingly innocuous part of the model known as Lesson Design. This strategy for presenting a lesson was developed by Dr. Hunter and Douglas Russell as a "...white sauce recipe...designed to help teachers plan."[1] Detractors somehow have come to the ill-conceived conclusion that this "Lesson Design" (say in reverent, hushed tones with eyes closed and hands clasped) constitutes the way to teach. Dr. Hunter stresses that the elements mentioned in her Lesson Design are merely suggestions which teachers can use when and if they see fit. She cautions teachers and supervisors alike to reject the notion that there is a "Madeline Hunter-type lesson" or that teachers are required to do anything specific in a given lesson other than provide effective, creative, well-conceived instruction.

This really isn't anything new. People without a true knowledge of the Elements have misinterpreted Dr. Hunter's message for years, feeling that she and her disciples spout absolutes about the "proper" way to teach. What makes this battle especially unfortunate is that a teacher who wishes to have a Whole Language classroom need not discard the effective teaching/decision making model which Dr. Hunter has identified. In fact, much of what is written about Whole Language sounds as if it could have easily come from an EEEI workshop. The parallels are clear and unmistakable.

Dr. Hunter says that one way to focus learners on the activity at hand is to use an anticipatory set, a principle of learning which actively involves the learners, is relevant to the lesson's objective, and may involve the learners' past experiences. Starting a lesson on space travel by having the students imagine what it would be like to fly on the space shuttle would be one such example. Those who claim that an anticipatory set is, in effect, a gimmicky, forced way to start a lesson need only look at the function of Stage One in the Shared Reading process where students predict what might happen in the story. Sounds anticipatory set-ish to me.

Whole language proponents caution against breaking down reading and writing into meaningless fragments. Phonics, spelling, and grammar in isolation are believed to be detrimental to the natural learning process. Dr. Hunter says, "You can know all the parts of

speech and still be a terrible writer." and also states "In a lot of schools, kids spit and sputter their way through

phonic skills and then when they come to a reading task, they don t use the skill."[3] There seems to be agreement here concerning the questionable value of teaching skills in isolation.

Dr. Hunter identifies demonstration/explanation as important teacher actions. I'm sure she would concur with the statement that "Whole language teachers...often act like coaches, demonstrating, explaining, and cheering so children can more effectively develop their own writing, drama, or science project."[4] She believes that capitalizing on the positive transfer of students' attitudes can assist in the learning process. This seems to tie in well with Linda Lamme's thought that "A key to developing early and successful primary school readers is to replicate as far as possible the conditions prevailing in the homes of early readers."[5] Dr. Lamme goes on to say that "If books that are read aloud are placed in the classroom reading collection, children can learn to read by re-reading familiar books..."[6] This fits neatly with Dr. Hunter's belief that appropriate practice greatly aids in retention of material and acquisition of new learning.

Another volley often fired in Dr. Hunter's direction by the nay-sayers claims that the Essential Elements as a model stifles creativity, both on the part of the teacher and the student. Yet Dr. Hunter seems to have anticipated this criticism, saying "...this model should provide a launching pad from which creativity can soar."[7] and "The more skilled the teacher is in using the model, the more independent and successful learners can become and

the greater variety of teaching and learning styles that can be used."[8] Whole language teachers insist that spontaneity in the classroom be encouraged. For example, Charlotte Huck relates this anecdote from Kristen Kerstetter:

> "My kindergarten class spent several days preparing for a field trip to a park. Once there, we divided into groups of five children with one adult, each group pursuing topic such as water, tracks, and shadows. As my group crossed over a wooden bridge, five boys began walking in unison shouting 'TRIP TRAP TRIP TRAP!' Six-year old Steve in his deepest, meanest, loudest voice, bellowed, 'WHO'S THAT WALKING ON MY BRIDGE?' We quickly abandoned our topic and began playing with the idea of The Three Billy Goats Gruff (Asbjornsen and Moe). We told the story to one another, acted it out, and chanted the refrain as others crossed the bridge."
>
> Children sometimes make connections between books and real life experiences in unexpected and exciting ways. How did Steve get to the point where bridge crossings could call up a literature experience? Obviously, Kristen's children were linking real life experiences with books they had heard read aloud at home or in school. Stories were giving added meaning to their lives. As a sensitive teacher who values literature, Kristen was quick to seize the moment and extend and deepen their joy in literature.[9]

It seems as though Kristen's decision to change her original objective is in agreement with a suggestion from Dorothy Watson that teachers focus on "...what goes on in kids' heads, whether planned or unplanned, intentional or unintentional..."[10] This flexibility and use of the "magic" that so often appears in the classroom is referred to by Dr. Hunter as being a "teachable moment" - a conscious changing of the objective on the part of the teacher. Rather than choking the spontaneity out of a lesson, Dr. Hunter says that we must capitalize on the beauty of these moments. The lesson is still in the teacher's control, the activities are still relevant to the newly chosen objective, and it is obvious that the "laminated lesson plan" is no more a part of the Hunter model than of the Whole Language

philosophy.

The statement that "...Whole Language notes the active character of learning."[11] parallels Dr. Hunter's belief that actively involving learners in the classroom will increase students' focus, the amount they retain, and the rate and degree at which they learn. Shared reading, shared writing, and the read aloud process are only a few examples of meaningful active participation in a Whole Language environment. Reading to and with students not only models appropriate and desired behaviors; it also allows for both consistent covert and overt activities on the part of the children. This procedure of modeling in conjunction with the active involvement of children in the communication process is key to Whole Language; it also makes use of active participation, one of the most powerful principles of learning as identified by Dr. Hunter.

Another part of the Hunter model which has striking parallels in Whole Language is the area of motivation. An analysis of Whole Language practices and beliefs shows how several of them relate to each of the variables of motivation included in the Hunter model:

Feeling tone - Dr. Hunter believes that a positive feeling tone in the classroom will increase motivation. The entire Whole Language approach seems to virtually guarantee a positive feeling tone where learners are encouraged to take risks. Students develop a true sense of self-worth and accomplishment as they are accepted as integral parts of the learning process, not merely as receptors of information. Efforts are recognized and rewarded through display of students' work

and the sharing of their labors.

Interest - Dr. Hunter states the obvious - that we are more highly motivated when we are doing things which interest us. A Whole Language classroom is full of novel/vivid activities. Big books, shared reading, and the like are meaningful and motivating to kids. Students are constantly involved on a personal level. This in itself makes the learning come alive.

Success - According to Dr. Hunter, "Very few people continue to be motivated in activities where they feel they have experienced little or no success."[12] Success is built into a Whole Language environment. Kids achieve success because the Whole Language teacher's view of what is successful is not necessarily the "traditional" view. A student is not criticized for faulty spelling or phonetic skills as if these skills were tantamount to achieving success in a reading/writing program. Also, in having their work displayed, students feel as though they have achieved success due to their own efforts. This ties in to Attribution theory, which says that students are more motivated if they attribute their success to their own efforts rather than to the task being simple.

Level of Concern - It is Dr. Hunter's belief (and common sense as well) that a certain amount of concern toward a task is necessary for motivation. Once this level of concern approaches anxiety, however, learning and performance can suffer. In a Whole Language classroom, level of concern is lowered in that kids become attuned to the fact

that they are accountable for their efforts and not solely for the final product. Kids are most definitely accountable, so the level of concern is also raised, in a sense, but the acceptance they find keeps this tension at an appropriate level which is conducive to the risk taking so vital in a Whole Language classroom.

Knowledge of Results - Dr. Hunter says, "Picture yourself trying to hit a target but never knowing whether or not you had. Or think of trying to lose weight without a scale or tape measure or even a tight belt to give you 'knowledge of results'."[13] Students in a Whole Language classroom receive constant feedback. Their efforts receive frequent reinforcement. And despite what some horror-stricken educators and parents believe, "skills" are not ignored. Students establish these skills in their proper contexts - as part of the language - rather than as isolated skills which have little meaning to real language and communication.

Intrinsic - Extrinsic Motivation - Ken Goodman claims that in a Whole Language program, "Motivation is always intrinsic. Kids learn to read and write because they need and want to communicate. Extrinsic rewards have no place in a whole language program."[14] I feel that this overstates the case against extrinsic motivation. Dr. Hunter admits that one of the goals of education is to move learners more toward intrinsic motivation, but she adds, "Intrinsic motivation is not saintly and extrinsic motivation sinful."[15] Displaying the fruits of a student's labors for public recognition can be seen as making use of extrinsic motivation. There

is little doubt, however, that intrinsic motivation is a noble goal. "Intrinsic motivation has the advantage that, once you discover the activity necessary to the goal, it remains constant. With extrinsic motivation you have to assess the environment anew each time in order to determine the activity to achieve the goal."[16]

Probably the single biggest parallel between Whole Language and the Hunter model lies in the area of meaning. Dr. Hunter says that meaning "...is probably the single most important factor contributing to successful and rapid learning....Attempting to have students accomplish a learning task which has little or no meaning is courting academic disaster..."[17]

True Whole Language instruction depends on making learning meaningful. It builds on existing learning, stressing the presentation of words in meaningful contexts. Kids learn to read and write by reading and writing real stuff. Whole Language teachers "...know that when language is broken into incomprehensible parts that the spell it can weave is also broken, so they present it whole."[18] Since kids learn oral language by talking, not by having language broken up into tiny pieces, it seems that learning to read and write should follow suit. Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores state,

> The key theoretical premise for Whole Language is that, the world over, babies acquire a language through actually using it, not through practicing its separate parts until some later date when the parts are assembled and the totality is finally used. The major assumption is that the model of acquisition through real use...is the best model for thinking about and helping with the learning of reading and writing in general.[19]

I have heard workshop participants object to Dr. Hunter's

suggestion that a task analysis may be useful in helping us to set our objectives at the appropriate level of difficulty for our students. The complaint seems to be that a task analysis takes whole learnings and breaks them into parts which can easily lose their meaning to the overall task, but Dr. Hunter is very clear in saying that before a task or skill can be broken down into its component parts, students should be aware of how these parts relate to the whole. If they do not see this relationship, the individual tasks may seem meaningless. (There may be exceptions to this if the teacher feels that sharing the "big picture" with the kids will cause great anxiety or confusion - but this type of exception would not apply to a Whole Language situation. Phonics and spelling in isolation are examples of tasks that can become too far removed from the overall skills, such as reading and writing.) The purpose of a task analysis is to help the teacher plan. It does not break down whole learnings into meaningless fragments, but it recognizes that every whole is made up of component parts. A task analysis can help us decide where to start with our kids. Dr. Hunter sees teaching as decision making, and a task analysis can help us make these decisions more intelligently. In simplest terms, we would not have our students read Shakespeare independently until we were sure that they understood the conventions of Elizabethan English. We could not expect a class of Kindergarteners to make any meaningful sense out of Dr. Martin Luther King's dream unless they had a little background first. A task analysis helps us assure that we aren't asking our kids to relate to a concept or perform a task which they are unequipped to handle. Doing so would divest the task of its meaning, and no one wants to do that.

Madeline Hunter reminds us of college psychology courses we had to take which have little meaning to us as teachers today. "Your memory of the extensive 'fall out' of what you learned in psychology, which had no practical meaning, should make you extra careful that what you teach has real meaning for your students."[20] It is clear that Dr. Hunter agrees with the philosophy that information in and of itself is of little use unless students can relate to it when she says, "One of the easiest ways to invest any learning with meaning is to relate it to the learner's own life and experience."[21] Furthermore, "Meaning...does not exist in material but in the relationship of that material to students' past knowledge and experience."[22]

Ken Goodman says,

> Language is inclusive, and it is indivisible. Whole language teaching recognizes that words, sounds, letters, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs are like the molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles of things. Their characteristics can be studied, but the whole is always more than the sum of the parts. If you reduce a wooden table to the elements which compose it, it's no longer a table.[23]

Madeline Hunter would no doubt urge us to build that table, making it strong and solid. Whole Language can provide the highest quality materials, but the table will fall apart in short order unless we use the sturdiest nails and the strongest glue to hold it together. Dr. Hunter is simply reminding us that the effective teaching techniques which she has identified - the ones so many of us are already using - can be those nails and that glue.

NOTES

1 Madeline Hunter, "What's Wrong with Madeline Hunter?" **Educational Leadership** 42 (February 1985): 59.

2 Madeline Hunter, **Retention Theory for Teachers** (El Segundo, CA: TIP Publishing, 1967), 9.

3 Ron Brandt, "On Teaching and Supervising: A Conversation with Madeline Hunter," **Educational Leadership** 42 (February 1985): 62.

4 Bess Altwerger, Carole Edelsky, and Barbara M. Flores, "Whole Language: What's New?" **The Reading Teacher** 41 (November 1987): 152.

5 Linda Leonard Lamme, "Children's Literature: The Natural Way to Learn to Read," Chapter 5 in **Children's Literature in the Reading Program**, ed. Bernice Cullinan (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1987), 42.

6 Ibid., 43.

7 Hunter, "What's Wrong," 58.

8 Ibid., 59.

9 Charlotte S. Huck and Kristen Jeffers Kerstetter, "Developing Readers," Chapter 4 in **Children's Literature in the Reading Program**, ed. Bernice Cullinan (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1987), 30.

10 Dorothy Watson, "What is Whole Language?" **Teachers Networking - The Whole Language Newsletter** 1 (April 1987): 4.

11 Altwerger, et al, 151.

12 Madeline Hunter, **Motivation Theory for Teachers** (El Segundo, CA: TIP Publishing, 1967), 24.

13 Ibid., 27.

14 Ken Goodman, What's Whole in Whole Language? (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986), 40.

15 Hunter, Motivation, 30.

16 Ibid.

17 Madeline Hunter, Teach More - Faster! (El Segundo, CA: TIP Publishing, 1967), 31.

18 Watson, 4.

19 Altwerger, et al, 145.

20 Hunter, Retention ,9.

21 Ibid., 5.

22 Madeline Hunter, Mastery Teaching (El Segundo, CA: TIP Publishing, 1982), 51.

23 Goodman, 27.

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